

C.I. Hovland and R.R. Sears Minor Studies of Aggression
VI. Correlation of Lynchings with Economic
Indices. Journ. of Psychol. 1940, 9,
301-310. p. 301.

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The hypothesis may be stated formally as follows: The strength of instigation to aggression varies directly with the amount of interference with the frustrated goal-response.

Certain kinds of social statistics furnish excellent sources for the investigation of this principle. A comparison of the total amounts of social aggression during various phases of the economic cycle is an instance in point. If our hypothesis is correct, it would be expected that aggressive acts should be more numerous during years of depression than during years of prosperity, since economic conditions, in general, reflect the ease or difficulty with which the customary economic activities of the members of a group can be carried out, and low indices or bad economic conditions represent a greater interference with

customary goal-responses than do high indices or good business conditions.

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It is evident from the correlations and the graphic presentation that the economic conditions of an area are intimately related to the amount of mass aggression displayed in that area as measured by lynchings.....

The reasons for this displacement of aggression are not hard to find. Although in any frustrating situation the strongest instigation is to acts of direct aggression against the agent perceived as the frustrator, such acts can occur only if the agent is available and if the act will not elicit too much counter-aggression or punishment. In the present instance the frustrating agent is not readily available because it is not an object; one cannot be aggressive against a condition represented by index numbers. It is true, however, that certain individuals probably represent the condition symbolically, e.g., merchants,



landlords, wealthy persons. These are individuals in a preferred and protected situation in society, however, and aggression directed toward them would elicit a relatively great amount of retribution (punishment). Hence, following the principle that anticipation of punishment inhibits acts of direct aggression and permits the occurrence of displaced aggression (2), the aggression is directed toward persons in a less favorable and protected position who are unable to mobilize adequate retribution.

(2) Dollard, J., Doob, L.W., Miller, N.E. Mowrer, O.H. & Sears, R.R. Frustration and Aggression. New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1939.

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An interesting study by Marshall¹ shows a close parallel to the present results. There the individuals affected were politicians, who were shown to be regularly voted out of office following periods of deficient rainfall.

Over a sixty-year period, in seven cases out of eight (presidential elections) when the rainfall was greater than normal, the party in power regardless of which one it was, continued to stay in power. On the other hand, in six cases out of seven when the rainfall was less than normal, a new swarm of political parasites descended on Washington.

For a later period it was shown that "the four wetter-than-normal terms were all followed by a continuation of the party in office, while the six drier than normal

terms produced five political upheavals"². The chance probability quoted by the author is only 1 in 14,603.

1. Marshall, R. Precipitation and presidents. The Nation, 1927, 124, 315-316.
2. ibid p.316.

